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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet presents the needs and characteristics of handicapped adults as an aid in developing and adapting educational programs. Following a discussion of the desire which adult educators feel to provide opportunities for all students, four general problem areas are described: attitudes of others, lack of mobility, diminished cognitive or intellectual capacity, and lack of communication skills. Three areas of concern for program development which have been identified by the Council on Exceptional Children (1980) are presented: accessibility, specially designed instruction, and cooperative planning. In addition, the following principles proposed by the Council are offered: (1) individuals with disabilities should be respected as adults; (2) they should have available the wide range of programmatic options available to nonhandicapped individuals; (3) they should be provided with educational programs on the same economic and administrative terms as nonhandicapped individuals; and (4) they should have the same benefits as the nonhandicapped when they participate in adult education. The final section describes the handicapping conditions and barriers facing the physically handicapped, the blind, the deaf, and the mentally retarded. A bibliography is included which cites two resources, both of which are available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. (DC)

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Adult Education for the Handicapped.
OVERVIEW: ERIC Fact Sheet No. 23.

by

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ERIC OVERVIEW

FACT SHEET No. 23
Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

ADULT EDUCATION FOR THE HANDICAPPED

Why Should Education Programs Be Developed for Adults with Handicaps?

Although public law and pressures from interest groups representing various types of disabilities have caused educators to make increased provisions for the education of handicapped persons in the past decade, adult educators have not been under particular legal or social pressures to serve disabled persons. Most adult educators, however, are interested in serving the educational needs of all adults regardless of legal pressures or obligations. They are aware that individuals grow and change throughout their adult lives and that developmental changes take place in all adults regardless of handicapping conditions. Although adult educators may want to provide educational programs that address the needs of all adults, they may be limited in their ability to serve adults with handicaps due to lack of information and understanding. This Overview provides some basic information about developing educational programs for adults with disabilities.

What General Problem Areas Need to be Addressed?

To ensure that handicapped individuals participate fully in educational programs, educators need to give attention to the following problem areas.

- ***Attitudes of Others***—The major problem facing the handicapped is attitudinal. Because the general public often exhibits negative attitudes toward them, disabled persons frequently do not have opportunities for social interaction with the community at large.
- ***Loss of Mobility***—Since many handicapping conditions affect mobility, disabled persons are unable to take full advantage of educational programs.
- ***Diminished Cognitive or Intellectual Capacity***—Most individuals with disabilities are not mentally handicapped, but certain disabling conditions (such as mental retardation) do affect intellectual capacities.
- ***Loss of Communication Skills***—Handicapping conditions frequently affect the speech, hearing, or sight of individuals, thus reducing the individual's ability to communicate.

Individuals with handicaps do have diminished capacities in one or more areas, but there is a tendency for nondisabled persons to ascribe more deficiencies to the handicapped than are actually manifested by their disabling conditions. In serving individuals with handicaps, adult educators need to be sensitive to these prejudicial tendencies and take steps to overcome them.

What Principles Can Be Used to Guide Program Development?

The Council on Exceptional Children (1980) has identified three areas of concern that need to be addressed when developing principles of program development.

- ***Accessibility***—To what extent do handicapped adults have the opportunity to participate in existing educational programs? Have the architectural barriers to participation been removed? Does the institution provide aids for various handicapping conditions?
- ***Specially Designed Instruction***—Are the needs and interests of handicapped individuals assessed in the program planning process? If necessary, are modifications made in the program design to accommodate those with various handicapping conditions? Are provisions made to support specially designed instruction?
- ***Cooperative Planning***—Are individuals with handicaps involved in planning educational programs? To what extent are their needs addressed when planning? Are community resources provided to meet the special needs of the handicapped?

Using these concerns as a guide, the Council has proposed the following principles to be used in developing education programs for adults with disabilities.

1. Individuals with disabilities should be respected as adults and their rights to make decisions about their education should be respected. Belief in the autonomy of the individual is an underlying principle of adult education and should be applied to all adults.
2. Handicapped individuals should have available to them the wide range of programmatic options available to nonhandicapped individuals. Adult education programs will need to ensure that there are no barriers to participation for handicapped individuals in the programs offered to the community.
3. Handicapped individuals should be provided with educational programs on the same economic and administrative terms as are applied to nonhandicapped individuals. Any adjustments in these terms should be made on the basis of an individual's ability to pay, not on the basis of handicap and condition.

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4. Handicapped individuals should have the same benefits as the nonhandicapped when they participate in adult education. If necessary, facility and program adaptation should be made to achieve this result.

How Can Educational Programs Be Developed for Individuals with Disabilities?

The following section presents information about four handicapping conditions and touches on program development for the physically handicapped, the blind, the deaf, and the mentally retarded.

The Physically Handicapped

Over 10 percent of the U. S. population has some long-term reduction in physical activity. Physically disabled persons are confronted with two types of barriers to participation in educational programs: mobility and attitudinal.

Attitudinal barriers confronting physically disabled persons are twofold in nature: (1) because of the nature of many physical disabilities, individuals with handicaps may have had limited contact with the community, and may therefore lack social and interpersonal skills; and (2) many able-bodied persons do not understand the true nature of disabilities and how to deal with the disabled. Adult educators can attack attitudinal barriers by providing information about disabilities as well as opportunities for contact between disabled and nondisabled persons in educational programs.

Once physically disabled persons overcome accessibility barriers, they are usually able to participate in regular educational offerings. However, adult educators may find it helpful, initially, to develop special programs for the disabled in order to get past their natural tendencies toward withdrawal and isolation.

The Blind

It is estimated that two out of every thousand individuals are legally blind. The most serious limitation suffered by the blind is a lack of mobility and its attendant loss of independence. The major accommodations that adult educators need to make to provide services to the blind are similar to those made for the physically handicapped. Once accessibility and attitudinal barriers are overcome, most regular adult education programs will be suitable for blind persons provided special equipment, such as braille readers, is made available.

The Deaf

Over 6 percent of the population suffers from some loss of hearing, but severe deafness is relatively rare. Like the blind, the deaf are sensory impaired. Unlike the blind, deaf people do not suffer from a loss of mobility; rather, deafness results in a loss of ability to communicate. Therefore, deafness and blindness present two radically different problems to the educator.

Because of their limited ability to communicate, many deaf persons rely almost solely on the deaf community for their information and social activities. The tendency of the deaf to depend on their own network for social and information needs has both positive and negative effects for adult educators. On the positive side, it is relatively easy to reach the deaf community with programs designed for its members' special needs or with regular programs of interest to them. But, on the negative side, many deaf persons are reluctant to venture forth from their social community, thus making it difficult to attract them into regular programs.

In addition to the social aspects of deafness, educators must also be aware of the significant educational problems faced by many deaf adults. Lack of communication ability of the deaf has a significant impact on instructional methods and procedures that may be employed in the classroom.

The Mentally Retarded

As more and more mentally retarded adults are deinstitutionalized, the need for community-based adult education programs for the mentally retarded will increase. Within the general classification of mentally retarded are three subcategories that are useful in planning educational activities: educable mentally retarded (EMR), trainable mentally retarded (TMR), and profoundly retarded. Of the three groups, adult educators will be able to work best with the EMR and possibly some of the higher level TMR group. The others require types of training methods that are feasible only in an institutional setting.

The major problem in developing instructional programs for the retarded is not how to teach them but what to teach them. Educational techniques required to teach retarded adults do not differ greatly from those used with regular students. More important is the selection or design of an appropriate curriculum for each individual. It is difficult to define the needs of this diverse population because most of these individuals are not yet self-sufficient.

REFERENCES

This Overview is based on the following publications:

Larson, Gordon A. *Adult Education for the Handicapped*. Information Series No. 240, $4.25. Columbus: The ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1982. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 220 722).

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This Fact Sheet was developed by Susan Imel, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.

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